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SUBJECT: WHO ARE THE PARAMILITARY COMMANDERS?

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Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Milton K. Drucker for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶11. (C) Paramilitary groups participating in peace talks in Santa Fe de Ralito submitted a list to the OAS of their 14-member negotiating team and 19 commanders who are present in the concentration zone. The largest paramilitary group represented in the zone is the AUC, which is commanded by three national leaders and several powerful regional commanders. The next largest group is the BCB, which has five commanders in the zone. Several independent groups participating in the negotiations have one or two commanders in the zone. At least four of commanders present in the zone are under indictment in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges. Three small paramilitary groups remain outside of the process. End Summary.

OAS Receives List

¶12. (C) In late August, United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) paramilitaries involved in peace talks with the GOC in Santa Fe de Ralito, Cordoba Department, submitted a list to the OAS verification mission of commanders who were in the concentration zone. The OAS mission provided Embassy with a copy. Using the names and order listed by the AUC, the commanders are:

Javier Montanez, BCB Military Commander

Victor Triana Botalon, independent paramilitary commander in Boyaca Department, loosely affiliated with the AUC

Ernesto Baez de la Serna, BCB Political Commander

Luis Cifuentes, Self-Defense Forces of Cundinamarca Commander

Julian Bolivar, BCB Operations Chief

Hernan Hernandez, AUC Calima Bloc Commander

Guillermo Torres, Self-Defense Forces of Meta and Vichada Commander

Pablo Sevillano, BCB Liberators of the South Bloc Commander

Miguel Arroyave, AUC Centauros Bloc Commander (died September 19, see reftel)

Pablo Mejia, BCB Vencedores of Arauca Commander

Ramiro Vanoy, AUC Mineros Bloc Commander

Salvatore Mancuso, Chief of the AUC Central Command ("Estado Mayor") and Northern Bloc Commander

Juan Carlos Sierra, an AUC field commander powerful in the Middle Magdalena region

Jorge 40, AUC Northern Bloc Operations Commander

Gabriel Galindo, AUC Pacific Bloc Operations Commander

Marlon Perez, paramilitary field commander

Adolfo Paz, AUC Inspector General and Pacific Bloc Commander

Pedro Frontera, paramilitary field commander

Jhon Santamaria, an AUC field commander powerful in western Antioquia Department

¶13. (C) The AUC also named the members of its official negotiating team:

Salvatore Mancuso
Ernesto Baez de la Serna
Hernan Hernandez

Vicente Castano (not listed as present in the zone)

Javier Montanez

Julian Bolivar

Jorge 40

Ramiro Vanoy

Miguel Arroyave (died September 19)

Ramon Isaza (not listed as present in the zone)

Victor Triana Botalon

Adolfo Paz

Luis Cifuentes

Guillermo Torres

Who Are The AUC Commanders?

14. (C) Since the disappearance and probable death of former United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) Political Chief Carlos Castano in April 2004, Salvatore Mancuso, Vicente Castano, and Diego Murillo have emerged as the most significant AUC leaders:

-- Salvatore Mancuso Gomez, AUC Central Command Chief and Northern Bloc Commander, controls approximately 1,800 paramilitaries in northern Colombia and is AUC spokesman. His two recent public appearances -- during the concentration zone's inauguration on July 1 and his address to Congress on July 28 -- revealed his celebrity-like status within parts of Cordoba society and his close relationship with Congresswoman Eleonora Pineda, who accompanied him throughout the congressional address. Mancuso was conciliatory toward the GOC during the initial phase of negotiations, but has now become less so, demanding, for example, a "re-definition" of government conditions, including a cease-fire. He often clashes verbally with Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB) Political Commander Ernesto Baez. Mancuso was born on August 17, 1964, in Tierralta, Cordoba Department, near the current concentration zone. He studied engineering at a prestigious Bogota university and reportedly studied English in Pennsylvania. He is under indictment in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges.

-- Vicente Castano ("El Profe"), a senior AUC commander, is the eldest of the three Castano brothers who founded the AUC (youngest brother Fidel Castano was reportedly killed in the 1990s). He plays a behind-the-scenes role and, according to the AUC list, is not present in the concentration zone. He does not attend negotiation sessions, but allegedly wields significant influence over Mancuso and other AUC commanders. Vicente is thought by some observers to be one of the intellectual authors of the murder of Carlos Castano. Press reports say he controls AUC finances and drug trafficking. Castano was born on July 2, 1957, in Amalfi, Antioquia Department.

-- Fernando Diego Murillo ("Adolfo Paz" or "Don Berna"), AUC Inspector General, is heavily involved in drug trafficking. Murillo came to the AUC after becoming a preeminent drug trafficker. He controls several thousand troops in and around Antioquia, loosely organized into the Pacific Bloc. His drug trafficking wealth has given him significant power within the AUC. According to OAS representative Sergio Caramagna, Murillo is skilled at rebutting GOC arguments for demobilization and legal accountability for serious crimes but rarely speaks during negotiations. Murillo was commander of the Cacique Nutibara Bloc (BCN), which demobilized in Medellin in December 2003. Both Caramagna and Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo have noted privately, however, that Murillo did not demobilize his core military structure. Murillo was born on February 23, 1961.

AUC Regional Commanders

15. (C) There are several regionally powerful AUC commanders in the concentration zone who have left their troops under the command of mid-level leaders in the field. These commanders tend to be less politically-astute and heavily involved in narcotics trafficking.

-- Jorge Tovar Pupo ("Jorge 40"), Northern Bloc Operations Commander, has gained power by expanding his drug trafficking operations. He is suspected of seizing thousands of acres of valuable land in Cesar Department through threats and violence, including the murder of a sitting judge. He put the AUC's negotiations with the GOC in jeopardy in June by kidnapping former Senator Jose Gnecco. He has been implicated in the recent death of an indigenous leader and the kidnapping of two other indigenous activists in August in the Sierra Nevada region. (The OAS verification mission is investigating the incident, but predicts that the truth will be impossible to uncover given the heavy control paramilitaries have in the region.) Tovar controls approximately 4,000 troops in Cesar, La Guajira, Magdalena, Norte de Santander, Bolivar, and Sucre Departments.

Recently, Tovar has been conciliatory toward the government. Peace Commissioner Restrepo held a secret meeting with him shortly after the Gnecco kidnapping. During the meeting, Tovar agreed to demobilize his troops and later persuaded Mancuso to back the idea. Tovar has told Restrepo that he wants to leave the armed conflict and is willing to turn himself in to U.S. authorities to "prove" he is innocent of drug trafficking. Restrepo speculates that the possibility of extradition to the U.S. convinced Tovar that demobilization was his best option. Tovar was born in Cesar Department to an affluent family.

-- Hernan Hernandez is commander of the Calima Bloc, whose several hundred troops operate in the departments of Cauca and Valle del Cauca. According to the OAS, Hernandez also controls the 350-member Bananero Bloc in Cordoba and northern Choco Departments, which he has agreed to demobilize. Two of Hernandez's key subordinates were captured in Medellin in early September. OAS officials who have dealt with Hernandez describe him as one of the youngest commanders, mid-ranking in terms of influence, and eager to demobilize his troops. He has acknowledged that he faces serious criminal charges within Colombia and must remain in the concentration zone if his troops lay down their arms.

-- Ramiro Vanoy ("Cuco") is powerful in Antioquia Department, where his Mineros Bloc operates. He is reportedly about 50 years old, a native of Boyaca Department, and has been affiliated with the AUC since at least the 1990s. He is under indictment in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges.

-- Francisco Javier Zuluaga Lindo ("Gabriel Galindo" or "Gordo Lindo") is roughly second-in-command of Murillo's Pacific Bloc. He is under indictment in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges.

-- Juan Carlos Sierra Ramirez is reportedly a powerful commander in the Middle Magdalena region. He was born on April 15, 1966.

-- Jhon Santamaria is an AUC field commander in western Antioquia Department.

BCB Commanders

16. (C) The Central Bolivar Bloc (BCB) has several thousand members and is the second largest paramilitary group. It held separate negotiations with the GOC until the concentration zone was formed, at which time it formally joined the "unified" negotiating table.

-- Ivan Roberto Duque ("Ernesto Baez de la Serna"), BCB Political Commander, is a skilled public speaker. Government and OAS officials who have participated in negotiations say Duque is a tough negotiator who believes violence and drug trafficking are justified to further the paramilitary cause. He has said that if talks break down, the BCB would form a right-wing insurgency to "rid the country of guerrillas." Duque was born on May 9, 1955, and was involved in politics in the Middle Magdalena region before joining the paramilitary movement.

-- Javier Montanez ("Macaco"), the BCB Military Commander, appeared publicly for the first time during the July 1 inauguration of the concentration zone. He controls the BCB's several thousand troops, which operate primarily in and around Antioquia Department. Restrepo has privately commented that Montanez is a major drug trafficker but keeps his record relatively clean by delegating the nuts-and-bolts of illicit activity.

-- "Julian Bolivar," the BCB's third-in-command, is similarly powerful and involved in drug trafficking, although Restrepo believes Bolivar has some ideological misgivings about dealing in narcotics and is more politically motivated.

Regional BCB Commanders

17. (C) The BCB has two important regional blocs:

-- Guillermo Perez Alzate ("Pablo Sevillano") is commander of the Liberators of the South Bloc, which operates along the Pacific coast in Narino and Cauca Departments.

-- Miguel Mejia Munera ("Pablo Mejia") commands the Vencedores of Arauca. His unit is one of three AUC/BCB groups that operate in Colombia's eastern plains and agreed to demobilize on August 12. Mejia and his twin brother Victor are powerful drug traffickers. Mejia is under indictment in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges.

Other Groups

18. (C) There are several commanders in the zone who represent independent paramilitary groups or were previously unknown to us:

-- Ramon Maria Isaza Arango is the commander of the independent Middle Magdalena Self-Defense Forces (AMM). Isaza unexpectedly joined the negotiating table with the AUC/BCB in June 2004, although his absence in the zone suggests he is not entirely comfortable associating with other paramilitary organizations or fully on board with talks. Our interlocutors have described Isaza as a more "traditional" paramilitary, who is less involved in drug trafficking and more interested in combating guerrilla groups. Isaza was born on September 30, 1940.

-- Victor Triana Botalon is sometimes described as Isaza's deputy and other times reported to be an independent paramilitary commander who operates in Boyaca Department. He has been associated with the AUC in the past.

-- Luis Eduardo Cifuentes ("El Aguila") is an independent paramilitary commander who operates in Cundinamarca Department and has sometimes been associated with the AUC. He was born on March 16, 1960.

-- "Guillermo Torres" commands the independent Self-Defense Forces of Meta and Vichada and joined the AUC/BCB negotiations shortly before the concentration zone was inaugurated. On August 12, he agreed to demobilize his troops.

-- We have no information on field commanders Marlon Perez and Pedro Frontera.

Those Not Participating

19. (C) Three small paramilitary groups remain outside the Santa Fe de Ralito negotiations:

-- The Elmer Cardenas Bloc, led by Alfred Berrio ("El Aleman"), operates in northern Choco and Antioquia Departments and has about 1,000 members. Aleman was a protege of Carlos Castano but refused to join negotiations on the grounds that most of the AUC commanders were involved in drug trafficking. His bloc has held separate talks with the government but has not formally agreed to a cease-fire or demobilization.

-- The Peasant Self-Defense Forces of Casanare (ACC), led by Hector German Buitrago Parada ("Martin Llanos"), has repeatedly told the government that it wants to demobilize but has demanded a concentration zone of several thousand square miles to do so. Buitrago did not respond to Uribe's August ultimatum that all paramilitary groups operating on the eastern plains demobilize or face the full weight of the security forces. The group has about 800 members who are being pushed into an increasingly smaller area of Casanare Department by attacks from other AUC groups. Buitrago was born on January 21, 1968.

-- The Tolima Bloc, led by Daniel Roa, has about 200 members and has not held talks with the government. GOC officials report that Roa is not closely tied to drug trafficking.

DRUCKER